

# **(R)evolving masculinities in times of change amongst small-scale fishers in North Wales**

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## **Abstract**

Whilst fishing men have commonly been investigated through the lens of ‘hegemonic masculinity’, recent studies have highlighted a potential change and nuancing of such fishing masculinities. Inspired by the call to pay attention to masculinities as fluid, contextual and interpersonal, this paper pays attention to scalar, placed and temporal specificities to consider how ‘socially-dominant masculinities’ can develop (and persist) in specific contexts. A case study of the North Wales Llŷn peninsula fishery is drawn upon in examining how local practices (re)define what it means to be a man in this area. The paper highlights the continued importance of the physicality of fishing in shaping locally socially-dominant masculinities – noting how fisher’s bodies are not only central to masculine performances but also embody their fishing history and their relative positioning in their locality. It considers the relational nature of fishing masculinities –noting how masculinity is written both spatially in relation to practices ‘on land’ and ‘at sea’ and also temporally through reference to both past practices and predecessors. Finally, the paper considers changes to fishing masculinities, especially associated with family life and changing economic contexts, noting how such new practices may be incorporated into longer-standing aspects of fishing masculinity.

Keywords: small-scale fishing; socially-dominant masculinities; rural change; intergenerationality; fathering; North Wales

## **Introduction**

Fishing is an occupation that continues to be heavily focused around the discussion of men (see Power 2005; Frangoudes 2013; Willson 2016; Zhao et al. 2013). Discursively the term *fishermen* remains, somewhat surprisingly, in popular usage, whilst the skew of policy discussions towards activities ‘at sea’ and a lack of sex-disaggregated data on fishing in many parts of the world ‘seems to have spread the idea that fisheries are exclusively a male

domain' (Frangoudes and Gerrard 2018, 118). Accordingly, reference to the fishing occupation –both in more popular discourses as well as in much academic research– has focused on the continued presence of hegemonic masculinities (after Connell 1995) which see fishers as stoic, hardworking and hard-bodied men who are risk-takers who embrace danger (Young, Foale, and Bellwood 2016). Although such depictions have been repeated across several studies in different geographical locations, there have also been suggestions that they may be more multi-faceted and more nuanced than this, with authors such as Power (2005) and Waite and Hartig (2005) calling for an appreciation that fishing masculinities are more than a singular blanket performance of 'macho'-type masculinity by all fishers. This echoes the observation for recreational fishing by Bull (2009, 445), in the pages of *Gender, Place and Culture*, which noted that 'watery' masculinities are likely to be provisional, uncertain and subject to change. In recognising this potential fluidity within occupational fishing, initial concern has focused upon the changing structural conditions of the fishing industry, with declining economic returns potentially challenging the fishers' position as 'breadwinner' (Adkins 2010). Alongside this, there have been suggestions that changes to both the governance of fishing and the technology employed within the industry may reshape the nature of fishing work and erode the predominant masculinity (Turgo 2014).

The following paper contributes to this discussion of evolving fishing masculinities through a consideration of what it means to be a man in a small-scale commercial fishery in North Wales (UK). As such, the paper sits within the feminist geographical literature which has focused on how masculinities associated within primary industries in rural areas –for so long a bastion of hegemonic expressions of masculinity– might be undergoing reformulation in relation to structural and social changes to rural areas and rural industries (Brandth 2016; Filteau 2014; Pini, Mayes, and McDonald 2010). At one level this work has seen how the changing economic fortunes of land-based and extractive industries have challenged the

previously stable position as ‘breadwinner’ (Filteau 2014) and how men might get drawn into other roles (Brandth and Haugen 2010) and might need to adopt less overtly-physical performances of ‘work’ as they reposition as ‘managers’ (Pini 2008). At a second level, this work has considered how changing societal norms –such as a greater concern with fathering practices– might differently shape the gender(ed) identities of different generations of rural men (Brandth 2016). In taking this discussion beyond the hitherto land-based discussion, the following paper seeks to develop our understanding of fishing masculinities by considering how local-level practices and interactions, taking place within the wider structural and social changes in the region and wider fishing industry, (re)shape the fishing masculinities that might be dominant in this context. Following a consideration of the extant literature in the field, and an outline of the conceptual framing and methodological approach, the paper examines the experiences of fishers and considers if, and in what ways, fishing masculinities in this region are changing.

### **Gender, fishing and masculinities**

In framing the more general discussion of rural men and masculinities (for an overview of which see Pini and Mayes [2014]) –especially those associated with outdoor, land-based occupations– Connell’s (1995) idea of hegemonic masculinity has proved useful and we take forward the recent expansions of this work to conceptually frame the discussion of fishing masculinities on the Llŷn peninsula in North Wales (UK). Connell and colleagues see masculinity not as a ‘fixed entity embedded in the body or personal traits of individuals’, but as a ‘configuration of practice’ which is accomplished in particular social contexts (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 5). As such, there may be multiple forms of masculinity that reflect the different embodied practices of men (and also women) and sets of gender relations which may vary in different cultural and temporal settings. As West and Zimmerman (1987) note,

how individuals 'do gender' is an embodied and ongoing accomplishment through interaction. Within this, masculinities are written not only in relation to femininity, but also in relation to other expressions of masculinity, achieving hierarchical positions of hegemony in different contexts (Connell 1995). Those dealing with fishing masculinities, both implicitly and explicitly, have noted that such embodied practices of strength, ruggedness and endurance remain significant for fishers (Fabinyi 2007; McGoodwin 2001; Turgo 2014).

Recent critiques of Connell's ideas have noted that too often hegemonic masculinity depicts power at the structural level and in relation to patriarchy and male power over women, paying less attention to how this plays out at the individual level (Hopkins and Noble 2009; Whitehead 2002). Similarly, tensions and intersections between different 'hegemonic' masculinities may coexist, with Coles (2009) using the example of the hard-bodied, manual labour associated with the hegemonic masculinity of the working class male, alongside the aggressive, slender, fit, suited business man who may represent the hegemonic masculinity in a multinational company. In revisiting their concept, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) draw the distinction between hegemonic masculinity –which they see as placing emphasis on hegemony as a political mechanism which results in the structural dominance of men over women– and masculinities which are 'socially-dominant' within particular contexts. Several authors have drawn on this idea of 'socially-dominant masculinities' (Beasley 2008; Filteau 2014; Messerschmidt 2012) –which pays attention to how particular masculinities may be celebrated, powerful or commonplace within a particular context, but recognises that not all socially-dominant masculinities are hegemonic as those 'men who legitimate an unequal gender order may only represent a minority of men who are not the most socially celebrated in a local, regional, or global context' (Filteau 2014, 397). Conceptually, this approach allows a recognition that non-hegemonic masculinities may be dominant in particular contexts and, significantly, these may offer a challenge to hegemonic masculinities that were previously

dominant (Messerschmidt 2012). As Filteau (2014, 397) notes, this approach allows an appreciation that there may be more traditional dominant hegemonic masculinities, which 'legitimate men's domination over women', but that dominant nonhegemonic masculinities may exist in particular contexts –that is, valorised masculine positions that are not predicated on this hierarchical positioning in relation to women.

In conceptualising socially-(non)dominant masculinities, spatiality and scale are important and authors such as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) and Sherman (2011) draw a useful distinction between global, regional and local scales. Those focusing on global scale discussions of masculinities pay attention to areas such as global media, world politics and transnational business. Those considering the regional level explore the cultural or nation state which is often observed in political, discursive and demographic research, whilst the local focuses on the face-to-face interaction(s) between families, immediate communities and is typically observed in ethnography and life-history research. Sherman's (2009; 2011) use of this scalar framework is instructive, as they note how structural changes to a town in California brings forward a disjuncture between global and regional masculinities. They argue that the previously dominant masculinity, associated with the formerly significant forestry industry, becomes unavailable and unattainable to men at the local level as they experience unemployment. They trace how men began to develop new and alternative forms of non-hegemonic, but locally dominant, masculinities and saw a change to the rules of what was seen as a legitimate masculine practice. Of significant conceptual importance here, therefore, is that recognising the situational quality of gender is also to recognise that masculinities are not static and that, instead, they are open to change (see also Deutsch [2007] and Schippers [2007]). Changes to structural conditions - such as those associated with industrial decline noted by Sherman (2009) - offer opportunities for more conscious, as well as more subtle, change to the local gender structure. In Sherman's (2009) example, attention

moved away from the traditional, 'rigid', masculinity associated with 'breadwinning' toward a more 'flexible' one incorporating practices of childcare, domestic chores and power sharing with women (Sherman 2009). Morris (2008) similarly notes the interconnection between regional and local scales in the consideration of high school masculinities, observing that aggressive 'red-neck' masculinities performed in the high school –and offering dominance in that context– clash with a regional subordination where this masculinity made it more difficult to secure employment. Although not utilising the same conceptual framing, Power (2005) and Waitt and Hartig (2005) introduce the concepts of 'corporate fisher' and 'managerial' fishing masculinities, driven by rationalist discourses of resource economics and biological sciences –which, they suggest, have come to the fore in what has been seen as the 'professionalisation' of the industry.

Running alongside these cross-scale links is a recognition of the importance of particular places and spaces to these gender identities. In line with the broader geographical literature, which recognises the hegemonic and dominant masculinities are contradictory and depend on the particular contexts in which they exist (for a review see Hopkins and Gorman-Murray [2014]), the discussion of fishing in various geographical contexts notes the distinction between fishing spaces on and off the water. Munk-Madsen (2000), for example, has noted how the space of the boat is deprived of positive symbols of femininity and becomes cast as a predominantly male domain. Others have considered this in light of the wider structural and patriarchal context of fishing – noting, for example, how the introduction of quotas has served to act as a barrier to women entering the industry and owning fishing enterprises (Gerrard 2008). Grzetic (2004, 16) offers one of the few examples where women transgress this gendered spatial boundary and move on to boats in Newfoundland, Canada. Relating to the aforementioned scalar issues, she argues that 'fishing crises' –which have brought about both professionalisation and at the same time downsizing of much of the

fishing industry— have seen women move on to boats ‘as a cheap source of labour [and] to ensure the survival of their families’. However, she goes on to note that men maintain their hegemonic position by being in control of boats and fishing businesses as self-defined ‘skippers’. Several studies have noted the gendering of spaces allied to fishing. The home, for example, is often cast as being the place of/for women and their emotional labour relating to childcare and homemaking (Munk-Madsen 1998; Munk-Madsen 2000). Others have noted that multiple ‘non-capture-fishing’ spaces, which are so central to the fishing industry as a whole, may be dominated by women - including onshore communities and processing factories (Skaptadóttir 1996; Skaptadóttir 2000).

Taken together, these ideas offer a framework for understanding fishing masculinities in several key ways. First, paying attention to the scalar aspects of masculinity allows us to understand locally-specific aspects of gender identities and performance. This is significant in allowing us to move away from more generalised understandings of fishing masculinities, toward uncovering how gender relations are highly context-dependent, allowing a recognition of how there may not be a single hegemonic fishing masculinity but, rather, fishing masculinities that are geographically, culturally and temporally contingent. Second, and related to this, we begin to see the importance of specific places in shaping how these masculinities are played as well as serving to anchor these masculinities. Third, we can begin to understand how masculinities may be reworked (or not) over time in relation to broader social and cultural changes as well as more specific structural changes to the industry.

### **Research Setting and Methodology**

The current paper draws on a wider study of the socio-cultural contexts of fishing lives on the Llŷn peninsula –a small-scale fishing region in North Wales, which sought to understand what it means to be a fisher and to live in a fishing family. We focus specifically, here, on the



narratives associated with gender relations and identities and the discussion of fishing masculinities (for a discussion of women in this context see Gustavsson and Riley [2018]). The area studied, the Llŷn peninsula, is a remote and rural part of North Wales with a population of less than 30,000 people (Gwynedd Council 2014). The area is often referred to as the ‘Welsh heartland’ (see Jones and Fowler 2007) and is associated with a strong sense of national identity and place-attachment, with over 80% of the population speaking Welsh as their first language – a pattern reflected amongst those interviewed (although the interviews were conducted in English). The Llŷn peninsula fishery is primarily small-scale (419 out of 451 boats were <10m boats in Wales in 2016 (Marine Management Organisation 2017)) and fishers’ fish for (non-quota) lobster, crab, whelk and scallop fishing from coves or boats on moorings. The fishery has undergone economic change, with lower than median annual earnings for this area (Welsh Government 2013) - with full time small-scale lobster and crab fishers reporting annual earnings of £17,062 on average in 2012 (Cambiè et al. 2015, 17) - and with a relatively high percentage of fishers working part-time (42%) (Marine Management Organisation 2017). In addition to fishing, seasonal tourism, health care and schools (most often employing women) as well as farming were the important sources of employment in the area. The area, as with many rural localities in the UK, has faced in-migration (particularly of retirees) –which has contributed to increasing housing prices– as well as out-migration of ‘skilled’ and ‘educated’ young people to other parts of the UK (Gwynedd Council 2013).

Both part-time and full-time fishers were included in the study and a total of 35 participants, linked to 16 fishing boats, were interviewed. Participants included members of fishing families, such as current male fishers (20); sons (7); daughters (2); and women partners or ‘wives’ (6) and are referred to in the following sections by pseudonyms (chosen from lists of common Welsh names for men and women). Whilst women, as the paper will

discuss, are crucial to the workings of fishing families, the women spoken to here did not self-define as fishers. Participants were aged between 18 and 75 years old (see Table 1 for details).

[Table 1 near here]

Initial contact was made with two local fisheries committees, with members providing a first wave of respondents, and chain-referral sampling (Heckathorn 2002) used to locate subsequent waves. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were used, and questions were asked about fishing practices, fishers' formalised and informal knowledge and ways of learning as well as their networks and everyday activities. Participants chose the location of the interviews, with these most often taking place in their homes or in proximity to fishing coves. The study deployed repeat interviews in order to cover more themes, as well as to facilitate different relational and locational contexts across interviews. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours, were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were coded manually and were analysed using thematic narrative analysis (Reismann 2008). Where permissible, participant observation was used to triangulate what was said in the interviews with participants everyday activities, practices and use of particular spaces. A reflexive field diary was used to record these observations and interactions. The paper reports on the subsequent themes which emerged from the analysis. Specifically, these relate to fishers' identities associated with their practices, bodies, knowledge and social networks and these are explored in the following discussion.

### **‘Get my hands dirty’ –the practice of fishing**

Perhaps the most common motif of the fishing man is that of ruggedness and stoicism,

demonstrating physical strength and the dominating masculinity of being hard-bodied (St. Martin 2005). Such monologic forms of masculinity were traceable within the interview responses of several of the fishers:

I have like a Neanderthal yearning inside me.[...] There is just this yearning, you get close to nature, get my hands dirty[...] [I] just like doing something that is close to the earth (Carwyn).

Getting up and going and doing the same thing day in and day out [like working in an office]. I couldn't cope with that (Rhys).

I get my exercise lifting lobster pots. Naturally. I don't have to go to a gym. I am quite strong. [...] But I am naturally strong. You lift 20 kg lobster pots into the boat (Carwyn).

This notion of getting 'my hands dirty' and being 'close to nature' echoes the observation of fishing as an embodied practice of masculinity (Gerrard 2013) and, at one level, suggests a dominant hegemonic form of masculinity associated with strength—something which was often used by fishers to legitimate women's exclusion from the practice of fishing itself. Significantly, too, the reference to these more traditional masculine expressions of physical strength were also drawn in relation to other men in this local context. Both Rhys and Carwyn spoke of their own strength in relation to non-fishing men. Whilst Rhys relegates the alternative occupation of office work to being monotonous, Carwyn notes that his strength is—'naturally' as he phrases it—born out of the physical work of fishing. For these fishers, their discursive, hierarchical, placing of their strength in relation to other men is not simply about being stronger, more muscular, or more hard-bodied, but that their strength is directly correlated to, and a result of, *work* in fishing. Even though fishers in this location are arguably economically marginal—particularly in relation to the newcomers to the areas who have bought up many of the high-value residences in these coastal locations— they claim social dominance through referencing the symbolic value of their strength (cf. Brandth 2006).

Here, they place greater legitimacy on this strength being derived ‘naturally’ from skilfully undertaking their work, rather than a more displaced muscular body derived from being in the gym.

Beyond the specific issue of strength, this notion of the body as carrying symbolic value for dominant masculine identity formation was also noted in the discussion of bodily changes, appearance and injuries – all of which were very common within interview discussions:

Interviewer: Can I ask you how old you are?

Blyddyn: 55. I look 70 I should think (Blyddyn).

A similar point is also made in the following research diary extract:

You can tell from fishers’ faces and hands that they have spent a lot of time outdoors. I remember talking to a young fisher and he referred to some other fishers as: ‘that fisher looks 80 but he is only 50...’ I think he had a point. The fishing life seems to make fishers look somewhat older than their actual age. Perhaps it is the salt, the sun and living on the sea that has these effects on the body? (Research diary extract 1).

All the interviews touched upon such bodily themes, noting how fishing bodies might take on a particular aesthetic, with the appearance of weather-beaten and sun-exposed skin, large and coarse hands being common bodily attributes which made many fishers appear older than they actually are. Although the literature on masculinity points to ageing and aged appearance as being associated with the move to ‘an invisible, paradoxical and unmasculine social category’ (Spector-Mersel 2006, 68), the fishing men avoided this positioning by linking their appearance to hard work and exposure to the elements, which in turn stood as testament to the hard work associated with the dominant fishing masculinity. This association with the physical act of fishing was also extended into narratives of bodily changes and injuries:

Lewys: Once the pressure came off my leg then it was pretty painful. [...] Cause it was just tourniquet down my leg. Sat down, had a cup of tea. Rang [my wife] saying I am gonna be a bit late today I think. [Laughing]. I started off again but really really slowly. It took me about two hours extra that day to go around [the pots] because I was really cautious and watching the ropes.

Interviewer: But you didn't go back home?

Lewys: No I didn't go home, no, no.

Lowri: Naaaa that is fishing for you... (Lewys and Lowri).

In the morning I visited Arwel in [place X]. I was waiting for him outside of the café and I could see him approaching the place where I was –limping. He made reference to having a bad back, said it was a natural effect of lifting millions of lobster pots in his life (Research diary extract 2).

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, Crossley (1996), argues that the body is the basis of human subjectivity and bodily practices help us to understand how gender is played out. The two examples can be seen as slightly different forms of what Lovelock (2012) has referred to as 'absenting the body' –a process central to masculine identity formation where the body is disciplined to ignore pain while laboring. Here, dominant masculinities become performed through fishers' ability to complete their fishing tasks despite the pain caused by getting caught up in the ropes in a near-death experience – as seen in the case of Lewys. Arwel, by contrast, refers to an ailment which requires a longer-term absenting of the body and associated stoicism. What is significant here is that whilst it was seen earlier that particular (male) bodies may allow inclusion into a group –or at least an exclusion of those who did not derive their bodily strength from fishing activities– so too the work undertaken by the body is central to the locally dominant masculine identity formation. For Arwel, his bodily frailty – which is seen as less than the hegemonic masculine ideal– is justified in relation to the 'millions of lobster pots' lifted, and the associated cultural and economic capital that they represent. This particular reference to fishing practices, repeated across all interviews, is an example of what Crossley (2006) refers to as recasting bodily pain (and frailty) as pleasure

through association with achievement. Moreover, for our wider understanding of masculinity such examples illustrate how it is not just place-specific enactments of masculinity that shape positioning by fishing men, but also how they are able to discursively draw on their past and embody this fishing history. Masculinities in this case are drawn not only relationally to other people and places (after Hopkins and Noble 2009), but also temporally through reactivating past histories in framing their current status.

### **In[ter]dependence and working with the risk of the sea**

As suggested in the last section, it is not simply their hard bodies that are important to fishers' masculine identities on the Llŷn peninsula, but how they are used. A crucial aspect of this, referred to in all interviews, was the ability to navigate the potential dangers at sea, echoing Power's (2005, 87) observation that fishers' 'ability to face and defeat a dangerous and unpredictable Mother Nature [sic] provides self-affirmation'. The two extracts below both reaffirm and extend such observations:

It is the freedom. [...] No day's the same. Weather, challenges, the season changes, it doesn't catch. You can have very poor days fishing and you can have very good days. You never know what kind of day you are gonna get. And you can be, like they say, the master of your own destiny. If you want to work hard [and] put the hours in you can make a good living (Rhys).

Predicting the weather, getting it right, when you move your gear close inshore, then moving them out before a gale. You have gotta be on the ball with things like that. You can't be lazy. [...] And if I do lose gear I am really pissed off, there has been a mistake or I misjudged the weather (Carwyn).

Whilst Rhys reinforces the oft-cited notion of ruggedness and hardwork in defining his work at sea, particularly relating to the unpredictability of the weather, Carwyn represents the more detailed appreciation given in the interviews –the skill of working *with* the weather. In their discussion of loggers, Brandth and Haugen (2005, 17) note that: 'Bad weather does not stop a

forest worker from doing his job'. For the fishers, however, the interviews revealed how their 'mastery' was not simply a case of ignoring or fully resisting the weather, but having the skill to work *with* it. Indeed, the context-specific nature of this relationship with the elements was noted by Selwyn, who commented that local farmers referred to fishers as 'fair weather farmers' on account of them not being on the sea in certain conditions that these farmers would see as less problematic. Whilst such labelling carries the potential for the subordination of fishing masculinities in relation to farming masculinities on the Llŷn peninsula, it was replayed between fishers themselves as being a positive aspect of masculinity. Being *selective* in when to be on the sea and having dexterity to navigate within difficult conditions were seen as significant symbols for their fishing success. Such displays of masculinity move beyond the bodily here, seeing the ability and skill to predict and work with the weather crucial to their status in this locality. All 20 of the (male) fishers spoken to noted how new technologies relating to weather forecasts, and the use of global positioning technologies, have aided in predicting and navigating the weather. Whilst regional-level forecasts and prediction technologies have been assimilated into their routines –mirroring other studies which have shown technology often becomes positioned as a male domain (Brandth and Haugen 2010)– fishers underscored the need to understand locally-specific indicators and micro-climates and how they shape both catches as well as seafaring conditions. Central to these discussions is that fishing might be a sporadic activity. Not being 'on the water' cannot be taken simply as evidence of a less dominant masculinity of not working hard or being productive, but is instead being a good fisher who is able to bide their time and choose the most appropriate time to fish. Such insights help us understand some of the more complex micro-geographies of masculine performance in this context and can be exemplified through the discussion of fishers' interactions and the theme of risk –something closely associated with hegemonic masculinities in fishing (Power 2008). Fishing is often

depicted as both an isolated and competitive industry, and such narratives came through, particularly at the start of interviews, from many fishers:

Yeeaaahh, I got more than you... [Laughing]. It is just male, what's it called? A man thing, I have got to do better than him, kind of thing, I don't know. Or it is just a fishing thing? (Denioil).

Engaging in deeper conversation in interviews revealed that the placing of these performances was especially crucial. The space of the pub and the boat yard were significant sites for the verbal articulation of this competition and exchange with other fishers. Here, particular stories of catch and skills used at sea were relayed to other fishers in more traditional expressions of competition and subtle one-upmanship. When on the sea, however, the issue of risk came into play and reshaped the dynamic between fishers:

It is better to be friendly than unfriendly I think. What [did] my uncle use to say? [...]  
Two mountains will never meet but two men will (Huw).

There is no point in fighting on land when one day you might need to help one another out there [at sea]' (Arwel).

Common in the responses of all fishers is that whilst fishing on the Llŷn peninsula might be an individualised occupation in terms of catch and earnings, there is a need for collective responsibility to ensure safety at sea –with each fisher relying on others to offer help in times of need or danger. Within this context, competition thus remains more discursive than literal, and skill becomes a more highly valorised component, than aggression and competition, of socially-dominant masculinities in this area.

### **(R)evolving masculinities in fishing**

As previous research has suggested, it is important to consider how local and interpersonal contexts and relations are central to understanding changes to socially-dominant masculinities



in different geographical contexts (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Filteau 2014). Work spaces and domestic spaces have been especially important within this discussion –often being (falsely) cast as inherently masculine (productive) and feminine (reproductive) (Munk-Madsen 2000; Power 2005)– and these spaces emerged as significant within interviews. Boats and fishing equipment, in particular, were framed as masculine domains:

It is boys' toys. You get to play with the tractor [and] a boat (Carwyn).

It is hard manual work for a women to haul in pots from the water because they can be quite heavy. I am not saying there isn't a winch on boat these days to help you. [But] you would have to be a pretty tough lady, I would think, to go out (Bethan).

The reference of Carwyn to 'boys toys' illustrates the common naturalisation of machines as masculine objects, similar to Saugeres' (2002, 149) observation that 'boys are seen as having an embodied taste for machinery and technical knowledge'. Moreover, whilst such technology might, in theory, make fishing a less physically demanding activity, it was inextricable tied, by fishers, to the need for physical strength and hence served to (re)create fishing as a male domain through this secondary form of marginalisation (cf Brandth [1995] and Saugeres [2002] for agriculture). Not only were boats status symbols *per se*, mechanical knowledge around them became codified as 'masculine knowledge' (Bull 2009, 451) –that is, seen as 'rational' and used as a source of power and distinction (after Rose 1993). An example of this process in practice can be seen in the following research diary extract:

Today I had a joint interview with two fishers. Throughout the interview I watched them work and asked a few questions about what they were doing. One of the fishers was fixing his engine. He explained that the 'so and so part', and 'so and so thingy' was broken and needed fixing. The language used was too technical for me to follow. I guess that wasn't the purpose of his speech. The two fishers were not only explaining to me what they were doing, but I felt they were portraying themselves as being knowledgeable of machinery. Complicated stuff –and, stuff that a young woman like myself wouldn't fully understand (Research diary extract 3).

Important to note here are the multiple ways that the fishing men utilise technological understanding to reinforce a socially-dominant position at this local level. First, technological knowledge becomes, here, the masculine domain similar to that noted for agriculture as well as fishing in other contexts (see Gerrard 2008). Whilst fishers did not foreclose the possibility of women operating machinery, they did not offer any examples of women holding, developing or having access to technological understandings –indeed the research diary extract hints at the potentially overt exclusion of women through the use of detailed mechanical terminology. Second, the display of such technological abilities and knowledge can be seen as a locally-specific enactment of fishing masculinity which differs from those which predominate at the regional and national levels. Unlike larger commercial fisheries who can employ specialist mechanics to service their boats and fleets, these small-scale fishers need to be a ‘jack of all trades’ (Denioil) –with prohibitive costs of out-sourcing boat maintenance and fixing meaning that the ability to fish *and* maintain fishing boat and gear has become a highly prized aspect of being a fishing man in this local context.

Undertaking, often singlehandedly, multiple tasks associated with fishing was a strategy employed by all of the fishers as a response to the changing wider structural conditions of the industry. The ability to remain ‘in fishing’ echoes Tyler and Fairbrother’s (2013) masculinised concept of ‘stay and defend’ noted amongst Australian farmers remaining on their land in the face of bush fires. Whilst Tyler and Fairbrother’s (2013) case is focused on a specific, dangerous, event, the more gradual, longer-term changes to the fishing industry in Wales have seen a subtle evolution of fishing practices and masculinities:

So, in a way you are forced to have to go [fishing] cause they [merchants, hotels and restaurants] depend on you for supplies as well (Rhys).

With fishing [...] you don't know what you are gonna earn every year. I suppose we have pushed it so that we have got other things. You need other things really. So that [...] it is more stable. [The] economy (Lowri).

Implicit within both quotes is the reference to a potential loss of autonomy –both in relation to the need, in some cases, to seek alternative forms of income (Lowri), and a more detailed engagement with purchasers (and the associated discussion of how they influence how and when fishing occurs). The wider literature on fishing masculinities has observed the emergence of ‘managerial masculinities’ associated with changes in fishing policy and a closer alignment with rational economic discourses (see Power [2005] and Waitt and Hartig [2005]). Whilst evidence of such an emergence can be traced in the extracts above, two aspects are important in applying this classification to fishers on the Llŷn peninsula. First, are how such new managerial forms of masculinity are intertwined with, rather than replace, more traditional fishing masculinities in this area and, second, the interrelated issue of how these are couched under the masculine identity of ‘breadwinner’. For Rhys, the reference to ‘having to go’ reinforces the notion of stoicism as providing for others who rely on his skill and effort. The associated administrative work was something that was rarely talked about, up front, within the interviews, instead being considered as a background issue and a ‘necessary evil’. Here, we do not see such activities –which Denioil refers to as being a ‘secretary’– as bringing forward a new type of masculine identity, but as another duty which enables them to maintain their existing identity. A more fundamental change observed by fishers was the reliance on partners and wives for financial income. Such engagement of women in alternative, often non-fishing, employment has been seen in many geographical contexts in relation to fishing (see for example Gerrard [2013], Munk-Madsen [2000] and Salmi and Sonck-Rautio [2018]) and has been extended to include not only a discussion of their employment, but also the contribution of their emotional labour (Munk-Madsen 1998; Munk-Madsen 2000). Whilst scholars in these other geographical contexts have noted that

structural changes may lead to distinct changes of practices, such as residential (re)location in relation to the occupations of women rather than fishing men (Gerrard 2013), they were afforded less significant status amongst our respondents. At one level, the interviews revealed what Munk-Madsen (2000, 340) has referred to as ‘under communication’ of the income-generating work that women undertook, with most male fishers making only passing reference to women’s work. At a second, subtler, level a discursive strategy observed from interviewees was referring to the historically uncertain and sporadic income from fishing associated with the vagaries of the weather and fishing season. As Denioil observed: ‘some days you get very little, other days we are doing okay’. In deploying this strategy, the fishers were able to discursively position women’s earnings as less of a distinct replacement for their own lack of earning power – placing it, instead as more simply complementary to the necessarily sporadic earning that has always been a part of fishing. Arranging such a fluid temporal framework –which foregrounds the uncertain, irregular, and sporadic nature of fishing catch– allows a relatively unproblematic incorporation of (women’s) alternative income and minimises its impact on the fisher’s masculine status.

This discussion of being at the mercy of the vagaries of the weather also impacted on fishers’ family lives. Whilst several fishers pointed to how they had been ‘absent fathers’ (Rhys) and, often more implicitly, the emotional labour that women provide through childcare and homemaking activities (cf. Munk-Madsen 2000), there was evidence presented by several fishers relating to the alternative ways of fathering being developed on the Llŷn peninsula:

I do have a wife and kids. And once the kids have grown I will probably be a full-time fisherman again. [Laugh]. But at the minute I have to do other things (Emyr).

But I don’t push my luck. I don’t want to drown, I don’t want to leave my family without a father. (Carwyn).

I think [with] the lad I have tended to maybe extend some of the fishing trips so that I know, if there is bad weather coming up, that I was home for all of the day rather than going out doing a bit of fishing. I would be around to watch him with his football (Lewys).

Taken together, the extracts above might be read as examples of what Brandth (2012) has referred to as a softening of masculine identities in relation to issues of family life and fathering, and what Sherman (2009) refers to as less rigid forms of masculinity. However, there are elements of each which highlight how more traditional expressions of masculinity may persist and become interlaced with these changes in specific practice. Emyr represents the most overt change to his fishing practices –the move toward part-time fishing. Whilst it has been seen in wider research that giving up work or moving to part-time work has been a challenge to more traditional ‘breadwinner’ and ‘work-focused father’ identities (Pini and Conway 2017), the particularities of fishing mean a less overt disjuncture. Emyr’s interview revealed how, for example, fishing on the Llŷn peninsula is an occupation that allows fluctuating levels of (dis)engagement –be that the amount of time spent on the water, or a period not working full-time as a fisher. Significant is that his absence from fishing was consciously *temporary* and, importantly, the masculine identity-enhancing practices of fishing were still available to him. For Emyr, not completely leaving the industry meant he maintained access to the socially-dominant masculinity that fishing offered. Moreover, and relating to the paper’s earlier observation on the importance of the past in relationally framing fishing masculinities, Emyr’s fishing lineage is important to the discussion. Emyr is a fourth-generation fisher in this region and inherited his boat from his father. As such, his fishing status relies not only on his current practices, words and actions, but is buttressed by the capital (social, cultural and economic) passed from his predecessors (see Gustavsson and Riley [2018] for a discussion of the intergenerational nature of ‘good fishing’). Being able to

draw on this intergeneration lineage, in combination with practicing part-time fishing, enables Emyr to maintain his legitimate fishing status amongst his peers.

Carwyn brings forward the aforementioned issue of risk. Their response illustrates how his transition into fatherhood reshaped and tempered his risk-taking activities and, salient amongst five fathers spoken to, a softening of the ruggedness traditionally associated with pushing the limits of safety at sea. Finally, Lewys represents a more nonhegemonic masculinity in taking a more equal share within childcare. Here, there is evidence of childcare being considered as important as the fishing occupation and significant is the placing of these fathering practices. Similar to Brandth's (2016) observation for farming fathers, the fishers construct their masculinity in relation to the past, noting the distinction between their fathering practices and the more hands-off approach of their own fathers. Significant though, is that their fathering does not lead to a reconsideration of the gendered domestic-outdoor distinction –but centres, instead, on active, outdoor and predominantly masculinised activities such as a football.

## **Conclusions**

Through a consideration of a small-scale fishery in North Wales this paper contributes not only to the discussion of fishing and rural masculinities but also to the wider discussion of the geographies of masculinity. The particular material contexts of fishing –being outdoors and undertaking manual labour– mean that several aspects of hegemonic masculinity, such as physicality, toughness and durability remain clearly evident in the narratives and practices of fishers. Whilst recent studies of masculinities in rural extractive industries have noted how structural and social changes have brought clearly discernible, and often large, changes to local expressions of masculinity, our case here has shown that such changes for the fishers in North Wales have been subtler and more nuanced. At one level, these wider structural changes, particularly the profitability to fishing and the wider threats to the livelihood, have

heightened the fishers' positioning as stoic and durable –replaying the common framing of rural masculinity with 'hero' status (Little 2002)– as they are the ones who remain in the industry. This observation is important for our broader understanding of fishing and wider rural masculinities as it highlights how ostensibly unchanging masculine constructs become replayed and reused in relation to changing circumstances. Whilst fishers' stoicism and durability in the past has come from their specific battling against the elements, it becomes reworked and valorised in the present in reference to their staying in the industry. At a second level, the findings highlight the relational nature of masculinities noted elsewhere (Hopkins and Noble 2009) also holds true for fishing. Not only, as noted in previous studies of fishing masculinities, do fishing men frame their masculinity in relation to other fishing men and women and partners, but also in relation to the past and to other men in the area. The longstanding fishing qualities of strength, for example, again becomes reworked –not simply as a competition of strength in comparing to non-fishing men in the locality, but that fishers' muscularity comes from *meaningful* and productive work in this locality. Such observations are significant in reflecting upon the idea of socially dominant masculinities. Whilst we see an erosion of some aspects of previously dominant hegemonic masculinity (cf. Filteau 2014), we also note that certain elements are drawn forward and thus remain central to maintaining social dominance in this locality.

The past is also important in relationally framing masculinity and this temporality is important to how we understand socially-dominant masculinities. A long history of living and working in the area facilitates social acceptance and aspects of social dominance, but also acts as a framing device to position away from nondominant masculinities such as those that might be associated with bodily ageing, frailty and injury. In these cases, the fishers lay claim to a socially dominant position by framing their aged, injured or disabled bodies as born out of, and inextricably linked to, the successes of their fishing history. For our wider

understanding of relational masculinities, the paper highlights that the past may not only be important for framing and legitimising individual fishers' practices, but may extend to predecessors whose specific status in this locality may be drawn upon and utilised in fishers' positioning in the present.

The paper has seen that place is central to fishing masculinities. The clearest articulation of this relates to being 'on sea' and 'on land'. The sea, and specifically the boat, are positioned as masculine spaces in opposition to the feminised home. This comes not only from the patriarchal histories and structural issues of ownership, but also through references to discourses of strength and skill. The paper has highlighted that this sea-land distinction is also significant for how fishing masculinities are drawn and performed between fishers. The materiality and inherent danger of the sea shapes how fishers work and interact. Fishing skill and the ability to work with the weather –rather than fight or ignore the conditions as noted in other discussions of rural masculinity (Tyler and Fairbrother 2013)– are more highly prized aspects of masculinity. These skills are inherently tied to place –with understandings of particular conditions and micro-climate central to what it is to be a good fisher in this area. These skills, in turn, shape interactions with others. The individualism and bravado, for example, that have often been associated with the fisher in popular narratives –and often referred to in socially-dominant forms of hegemonic masculinity in many rural occupations (cf. Riley and Sangster 2017)– are bounded by the need to work collectively and convivially at sea. Limiting risk and danger, by being able to call on other fishers in the region, means that such overt acts of bravado and showmanship are often limited to rhetorical and playful acts on land rather than at sea.

More overt ways that fishing masculinities are being reworked related to the theme of family –with women's role in the workplace and fishers' great attention to fathering two emergent themes. Although the loss of the role of 'breadwinner' is seen as a major challenge



to result from the restructuring of rural industries (Filteau 2014) –and a potential threat in the current research where women referred to taking on new forms of work more often– the specifics of fishing may make such a change less distinct. The irregular and potentially sporadic income from fishing –something referred to by respondents as a common trait of their fishing history– means that fishers can accommodate their partners’ work as part of this natural process without losing socially dominant masculine status. Indeed, as seen earlier, the valorisation of fishers’ skill of selecting when to be safely on the water, mean that additional income is framed as resulting from the vagaries of fishing, rather than as a challenge to fishing masculinities. More progressively, the natural rhythms and fluctuations of fishing, and its particular temporalities, mean that changes to fathering practices might be more easily accommodated amongst fishers than in other industries –as fishers in this context were able to work part-time and be flexible in their working patterns. Whilst such new forms of masculinity might be observed, we have seen that they are commonly interspersed with, rather than replace, longer-standing aspects of fishing masculinities.

### **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank the fishing families who volunteered their time to this research. We also want to extend our thanks to the three anonymous reviewers and the editors, Pamela Moss and Katherine Brickell, who provided very generous comments on the initial version of this paper. Madeleine also thanks Memorial University and University of Zurich for providing space and collegial support when writing this paper. This work was supported by the School of Environmental Sciences, University of Liverpool; and the Economic and Social Research Council under Grant ES/R00580X/1.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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**Table 1.** An outline of the participant whose voices are used to represent themes in the analysis.

<b>Participant pseudonym</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Age range</b>	<b>Involvement with fishing</b>
Lowri	Woman; partner of a fisher	40-50	Pre/post-harvesting; part-time employment in health care sector
Carwyn	Male fisher	40-50	Part-time
Rhys	Male fisher	40-50	Full-time
Blyddyn	Male fisher	50-60	Full-time
Lewys	Male fisher	40-50	Full-time
Selwyn	Male fisher	40-50	Part-time
Denioil	Male fisher	30-40	Full-time
Emyr	Male fisher	40-50	Part-time
Huw	Male fisher	60-70	Full-time
Arwel	Male fisher	40-50	Part-time
Bethan	Woman; partner of a fisher	60-70	Pre/post-harvesting; full-time employment in care